



File Code: 1920/1950
Subject: East Reservoir Project-Specific Amendments

Date: March 4, 2014

INTRODUCTION

The East Reservoir Environmental Impact Statement would suspend the following four Forest Plan standards in order to implement Alternative 2 with modifications.

Management Area 15 Recreation Standard #4

"The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is maximum modification."
(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-65)

Management Area 12 Recreation Standard #2

"The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of maximum modification in areas of low visual significance, modification in areas of moderate visual significance, and partial retention in areas of high visual significance, unless infeasible when attempting to meet the goals of the management area."
(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-48)

Management Area 16 Recreation Standard #4

"The minimum Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is modification."
(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-69)

Management Area 12 Wildlife and Fish Standard #7

"Maximum edge effect within economical timber harvest constraints, by shaping timber harvest units and maintain movement corridors of at least two sight distances between openings. When the edge is maximized, the shape becomes more important than the size of the units, but generally the unit size should not exceed: elk and mule deer – 40 acres or less; Moose and whitetail deer – 20 acres."
(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-49)

BACKGROUND:

The East Reservoir project area is the Cripple Planning Subunit (PSU). The Cripple PSU is approximately 92,407 acres in size and is located approximately 15 miles east of Libby, Montana on the Libby Ranger District. The legal description of the analysis area includes all or portions of T30N, R28W, Sections 2 to 11, 13 to 30 and 32 to 36; T30N, R29W, Sections 1 to 4, 9 to 16 and 24; T31N, R327W, Sections 3 to 10, 15 to 18, 20 to 22, 28 and 29; T31N, R28W, Sections 1 thru 36; T31N, R29W, Sections 1, 2, 10 to 15, 22, 23, 26 to 36; T32N, R27W, Sections 7 to 9, 14 to 23 and 26 to 33; T32N, R28W, Sections 2 to 5 and 8 to 36; and T32N, R29W, Sections 24 to 26, 35 and 36, Lincoln County Montana.

Alternative 2 with modifications, the selected alternative, is comprised of timber harvest and associated fuel treatment on 8,845 acres, precommercial thinning on approximately 5,775 acres, planting of conifer seedlings on approximately 3,348 acres, prescribed fire treatments on 4,149 acres, new road construction totaling approximately 9 miles, temporary road construction totaling approximately 4.3 miles, Best Management Practice (BMP) and road maintenance work to approximately 176.4 miles, a change from seasonal closure to yearlong, open access on approximately 0.2 miles, access changes from motorized to non-motorized on five trails totaling of approximately 27 miles, decommissioning work is authorized on 5.9 miles of existing road, road storage totaling approximately 16 miles, approximately 13 miles of undetermined roads will be added to the National Forest System. The Forest Service and the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) have proposed to cost-share approximately 30 miles of road. Access to recreation sites on the south side of the mouth of Fivemile Creek and in the Yarnell area would be improved, a new non-motorized trail within the East Reservoir analysis area will be created, and design features and mitigation measures to protect resource values are included.

PURPOSE and NEED for the AMENDMENT

The purpose and need for this project is to:

- Re-establish, restore and retain landscapes that are more resistant and resilient to disturbance (insect and



- disease infestations, fire) and uncertain environmental conditions such as climate change;
- Create a heterogeneous landscape that provides a variety of habitats to sustain populations of terrestrial and aquatic species;
- Provide amenities, jobs and products to the communities;
- Reduce hazardous fuels adjacent to private property and across the landscape while re-introducing fire to the ecosystem;
- Enhance recreation settings and facilities with the goal of providing high quality experiences.

EXISTING CONDITION

The sensitivity of the East Reservoir area viewshed is determined by the high percentage/acres of Forest Service (FS) ownership and seen area as viewed from Sensitivity Level (SL) 1 or 2 travel routes (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 363). Currently, large geometric shaped tree harvest units (seed tree, clearcut) are found predominantly in the headwaters of the project drainages on north/east aspects and are viewed mostly from local roads. These have uncharacteristic form/line and do not mimic the natural openings present.

PROPOSED ACTIVITY

The preferred alternative (Alternative 2 with modifications) proposes to amend the Forest Plan on a project-specific basis in several ways listed below.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC AMENDMENT #1

The East Reservoir Record of Decision (ROD) would suspend the following Forest Plan standard in order to implement the selected alternative:

Management Area 15 Recreation Standard #4

“The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is maximum modification.”

(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-65)

Unit 40 (156 acres) is proposed as an over 40 acre regeneration harvest, but does not mimic the large historic patch size of 5,000 to 100,000 acres. However, it is placed adjacent to past harvests that are recovered, but are within the early-successional stage. By blocking these units with other early-successional stage patches, this larger block mimics historic conditions and would move into the future as a connected patch of interior forest (DEIS, Vegetation Report, p. 45, 46, 47). Even though the unit will be viewed from a SL 3 (Significance Level 3 = very low) road, visually, due to large unit size, position of unit (face terrain), low number of leave trees (seedtree harvest, 93% of canopy removed) the proposed treatment would not meet KNFP standards of maximum modification for scenic resources (FEIS, Ch.3, pg. 367).

Unit 75 (36 acre shelterwood) sits next to Unit 188 (40 acre seedtree) creating an opening in excess of 40 acres. This treatment would be effective at reducing hazardous fuels, reducing crown fire potential, and improving fire suppression efficacy. Separately, these units meet VQOs but they are located adjacent to each other on the ground making a 76 acres seedtree/shelterwood harvest which removes 90% of the canopy. Due to large unit size, position of unit, low number of leave trees, the proposed treatment would not meet KNFP standards of maximum modification for scenic resources (FEIS, Ch.3, pg. 370, 372). This area has a very low visual significance level.

Unit 147 (93 acre seedtree), Unit 148 (77 acre seedtree), Unit 149 (65 acre seedtree) and Unit 150 (103 acre seedtree) are proposed for over 40 acre regeneration harvests. These units were designed to tie in with past regeneration harvests to simulate a fire that would have burned from the creek bottom to the ridge top due to continuous fuels and favorable topography. Treatments of this scale are more likely to disrupt large fire growth and spread and assist in the efficacy of suppression efforts when a fire occurs in these areas. Fire modeling indicates these areas are at risk of experiencing stand-replacing crown fire behavior if left untreated. With regard to wildlife, this strategy may result in openings that may not be fully utilized by elk as foraging areas; however, creating these openings reduces edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with more smaller harvest units.

When considered in combination with existing adjacent openings on National Forest System lands

these regeneration harvests would create six openings larger than 40 acres in size. Opening sizes would decrease over time as regeneration is established and grows. It was estimated that regeneration openings will be hydrologically recovered when they are approximately 25-30 years old. By the time a regeneration opening is this old, trees are tall enough to maintain canopy cover above the average winter snow depths and moderate rates of snow melt. The time required to realize hydrologic recovery is longer than the recovery needs of other resources and is therefore the most conservative estimate of recovery for openings caused by even-aged regeneration harvest.

Alternative 2 with modifications will reduce tree canopy from fully stocked to a seedtree and/or shelterwood prescription in concert with exceeding 40 acre limitation as directed by NFMA. Treatment of these units supports purpose and need statement to re-establish, restore and retain landscapes that are more resistant and resilient to disturbance (insect and disease infestations, fire) and uncertain environmental conditions such as climate change.

UNIT #	HARVEST METHOD	TOTAL OPENING (acres)	BENEFITING RESOURCE
40	Seedtree	156	Wildlife: Reduce edge effect and fragmentation by blocking up treatment areas together versus 40 acre blocks. This will ultimately increase patch size in the future forested stand, which will benefit interior wildlife species. The immediate post-treatment stand will provide forage.
75	Shelterwood	36	Wildlife: Creating openings over 40 acres better approximates the patch size and pattern of habitat that would have been available under natural processes and reduce edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with more smaller openings.
147	Seedtree	93	Wildlife: species associated with interior forest will benefit from creating openings over 40 acres because it better approximates the patch size and pattern of habitat that would have been available under natural processes, and reduce edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with more smaller openings.
148	Seedtree	77	
149	Seedtree	65	
150	Seedtree	103	Fuels: These larger treatments reduce fuels and provide a fuel break immediately adjacent to a major power transmission line. By locating the units adjacent to past treatments they will be more effective at disrupting large fire growth and be more conducive to fire control actions.

The Forest Plan states, "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project"

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA 15 which is timber production using various standard silviculture practices while providing for other resource values such as soil, air, water, wildlife, recreation and forage for domestic livestock (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-64).

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC AMENDMENT #2

The East Reservoir Record of Decision (ROD) would suspend the following Forest Plan standard in order to implement the selected alternative:

Management Area 12 Recreation Standard #2

"The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of maximum modification in areas of low visual significance, modification in areas of moderate visual significance, and partial retention in areas of high visual significance, unless infeasible when attempting to meet the goals of the management area."

(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-48)

Unit #362 (192 acres) does not meet MA 12 visuals direction because it is planned for regeneration treatment (clearcut) to exceed 40 acres with the resulting visual quality objective (VQO) of unacceptably moderate (FEIS, Ch.3, pg. 373) due to reducing tree canopy from fully stocked to a clearcut. This area has a very low visual significance level.

Treatment of Unit 362 supports the purpose and need statement to re-establish, restore and retain landscapes that are more resistant and resilient to disturbance (insect and disease infestations, fire) and uncertain environmental conditions such as climate change.

When considered in combination with existing adjacent openings on NFS lands these regeneration harvests would create six openings larger than 40 acres in size. Opening sizes would decrease over time as regeneration is established and grows. It was estimated that regeneration openings will be hydrologically recovered when they are approximately 25-30 years old. By the time a regeneration opening is this old, the conifer regeneration is tall enough to maintain enough canopy cover above the average winter snow depths to moderate rates of snow melt. The time required to realize hydrologic recovery is longer than the recovery needs of other resources and is therefore the most conservative estimate of recovery for openings caused by even-aged regeneration harvest.

UNIT #	HARVEST METHOD	TOTAL OPENING (acres)	BENEFITING RESOURCE
362	Clearcut	192	Fuels: Reduce fuels and provide a fuel break immediately adjacent to a major power transmission line. By locating the units adjacent to past treatments they will be more effective at disrupting large fire growth and be more conducive to fire control actions.

The Forest Plan states, "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project"

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA 12 which is to maintain or enhance nonwinter big-game habitat and produce a programmed yield of timber (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-48). This strategy may result in openings that may not be fully utilized by elk as foraging areas, however, creating these openings reduces overall edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with greater number of openings of lesser acreage. Additionally, stringers and groups of trees would be left within the units to provide screening and minimize the effect of the openings when possible.

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC AMENDMENT #3

The East Reservoir Record of Decision (ROD) would suspend the following Forest Plan standard in order to implement the selected alternative:

Management Area 16 Recreation Standard #4

"The minimum Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is modification."

(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-69)

Unit #73T (31 acres) and Unit 188 (40 acres) are adjacent to one-another. Together they do not meet MA 16 visuals direction because the planned for regeneration treatment (seedtree) combines to exceed 40 acres with the resulting visual quality objective (VQO) of maximum modification (FEIS, Ch.3, pgs. 370, 372) due to reducing tree canopy from fully stocked.

When considered in combination with existing adjacent openings on NFS lands these regeneration harvests would create six openings larger than 40 acres in size. Opening sizes would decrease over time as regeneration is established and grows. It was estimated that regeneration openings will be hydrologically recovered when they are approximately 25-30 years old. By the time a regeneration

opening is this old, the conifer regeneration is tall enough to maintain enough canopy cover above the average winter snow depths to moderate rates of snow melt. The time required to realize hydrologic recovery is longer than the recovery needs of other resources and is therefore the most conservative estimate of recovery for openings caused by even-aged regeneration harvest. As for visual quality, within 15-25 years of the proposed treatments, intermediate/tall shrubs and tree regeneration would be noticeable in the treated areas (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 376). The effect to visual quality is relatively short-term and does not negatively affect other resources.

Alternative 2 with Modifications will reduce tree canopy from fully stocked to a seedtree prescription in concert with exceeding 40 acre limitation as directed by NFMA. Treatment of these units supports the purpose and need statement to re-establish, restore and retain landscapes that are more resistant and resilient to disturbance (insect and disease infestations, fire) and uncertain environmental conditions such as climate change.

UNIT #	HARVEST METHOD	TOTAL OPENING (acres)	BENEFITING RESOURCE
73T	Seedtree	31	Wildlife: Creating openings over 40 acres better approximates the patch size and pattern of habitat that would have been available under natural processes and reduce edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with a greater number of openings of lesser acreage.
188	Seedtree	40	Wildlife: Creating openings over 40 acres better approximates the patch size and pattern of habitat that would have been available under natural processes and reduce edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with a greater number of openings of lesser acreage.

The Forest Plan states, "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project"

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA 16 which is to produce timber while providing for a pleasing view (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-69). The visual quality effect is relatively short-term and does not negatively affect other resources. Within 15-25 years of the proposed treatments, intermediate/tall shrubs and tree regeneration would be noticeable in the treated areas. These larger patches will lead to a more pleasing view at that time.

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

PROJECT-SPECIFIC AMENDMENT #4

The East Reservoir Record of Decision (ROD) would suspend the following Forest Plan standard in order to implement the selected alternative:

Management Area 12 Wildlife and Fish Standard #7

"Maximize edge effect within economical timber harvest constraints, by shaping timber harvest units and maintain movement corridors of at least two sight distances between openings. When the edge is maximized, the shape becomes more important than the size of the units, but generally the unit size should not exceed: elk and mule deer – 40 acres or less; Moose and whitetail deer – 20 acres."

(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-49)

Alternative 2 proposes one unit with acreage in MA 12 land that result in openings that do not meet this standard. Unit 362 (clearcut) results in a 192 acre opening in MA 12. Therefore, a site-specific KNFP amendment is necessary for this unit.

Treatment of Unit 362 supports the purpose and need statement to re-establish, restore and retain landscapes that are more resistant and resilient to disturbance (insect and disease infestations, fire) and uncertain environmental conditions such as climate change.

Alternative 2 with Modifications will reduce tree canopy from fully stocked to a seedtree and/or shelterwood prescription in concert with exceeding 40 acre limitation as directed by NFMA. While local movement of big game may be affected as a result of one 192 acre unit, one unit results in less edge effect than a number of units (in this case up to five units at 40 acres each) with forested corridors of 600 feet separating the units. Reducing edge effect is favorable for many resident species including goshawks, varoius woodpeckers, fisher, and once the 192 unit re-establishes hiding cover (approximately 15 years) a large block of uniform interior forest will result for those species more associated with interior forest habitats.

Amendment #4 amends the edge effect and movement corridors standard for MA 12. One 192 acre unit results in less edge effect than a number of units (in this case up to five units at 40 acres each) with forested corridors of 600 feet separating the units. Reducing edge effect is favorable for many resident species, such as fisher, brown creeper, goshawk, and lynx, and once the 192 unit re-establishes hiding cover (approximately 15 years) a large block of uniform interior forest will result for those species more associated with interior forest habitats. Contrarily, edge creation is beneficial to many other hawk species such as red-tails and other birds including black-headed cowbirds for both foraging and nesting . Any edge creation will benefit these species in the 15 to 30 years immediately following harvest. However as time progresses, these larger patch sizes and subsequent interior forest development will become more beneficial to those interior species listed previously by creating areas for movement, nesting, rearing and foraging.

UNIT #	HARVEST METHOD	TOTAL OPENING (acres)	BENEFITING RESOURCE
362	Clearcut	192	Wildlife: species associated with less edge effect and interior forest-creating openings over 40 acres better approximates the patch size and pattern of habitat that would have been available under natural processes and reduce edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with a greater number of openings of lesser acreage.

The Forest Plan states, "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project"

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA 12 which is to maintain or enhance nonwinter big-game habitat and produce a programmed yield of timber by creating a more natural distribution (shape, size, juxtaposition) of cover and forage for big game through time and across the landscape, attempting to avoid multiple entries, and resulting in less overall disturbance (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-48).

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

ALTERNATIVES/MITIGATION CONSIDERED

Alternative 3 was considered in detail and designed so no Forest Plan amendments would be required. All treatments in units that would not meet Visual Quality Objectives were dropped. This alternative was not selected because it did not meet the purpose and need to restore historic stand density and associated wildlife habitat as well as other alternatives.

In addition, a "no-action" alternative was considered in detail in the EIS. This alternative does not meet the purpose and need statements listed in Chapter 2 of the EIS and was therefore, not selected.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The public was notified that amendments would be needed to implement the project. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) states that Alternative 2 would not meet standards for meeting VQOs in MAs 12, 15 and 16; and not meeting standard for opening size in MA 12. The East Reservoir

DEIS has been through a 45-day comment period.

EFFECTS ANALYSIS

Alternative 2 with Modifications include regeneration timber harvest in MAs 12, 15, and 16 that will negatively affect visual quality and/or movement corridors with regard to several units. Analysis of effects to visuals indicates that the visual quality objectives from the Forest Plan would not be met, but other resources are not negatively affected (see EIS Chapter 3).

Analysis of effects to wildlife indicate that openings over 40 acres may not be fully utilized by elk as foraging areas, but creating these openings reduces overall edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with greater number of openings of lesser acreage. Stringers and groups of trees would be left within the units to provide screening and minimize the effect of the openings when possible. There may be short-term disturbances within identified big game travel corridors due to project related activities (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 224).

Analysis of effects to vegetation indicates units over 40 acres are adjacent to past existing harvests that are recovered but are within the early-successional stage. By blocking up these units with other early-successional stages this larger block mimics historic conditions and would move into the future as a connected patch of interior forest which is the desired condition. It is assumed that natural conditions are restored where treatment is moving the stand toward the target conditions (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 46).

No long-term effects are anticipated for Threatened, Endangered, or Sensitive (TES) species. Effects to TES species have been analyzed and are contained in the biological assessment and biological evaluation located in the EIS and project file. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has consulted on the findings of the Biological Assessment and has concurred with the findings that the East Reservoir project *may affect but is not likely to adversely affect* the grizzly bear, Canada lynx, and lynx critical habitat. The project and amendments *would have no direct or indirect effects* in the Tobacco grizzly bear outside recovery zone (BORZ) polygon due to limited and /or lack of occupancy by the species as disclosed in Table 3.99 of the DEIS (page 297).

For sensitive species, the project *may impact individuals and/or habitat, but would not contribute to a trend toward federal listing or loss of species viability* for the bald eagle, bighorn sheep, black-backed woodpecker, fisher, flammulated owl, Townsend's big-eared bat, western toad, and gray wolf.

Cumulative Effects

Visually, within 15-25 years of the proposed treatments, intermediate/tall shrubs and tree regeneration would be noticeable in the treated areas (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 376). Other VQO forest plan amendments on the Forest include one for the McSwede project area on the Libby District in 2000, and one for the Parsnip Lodgepole Salvage Timber Sale on the Rexford Ranger District in 1999. Neither of these openings abut the current project area. Both allowed short-term impacts to visuals, which are either at or approaching 15 years since implementation. Therefore the period of impact for which the amendment was made is nearly expired, and no cumulative effect with the current amendments would occur.

Amendment 4 amends the plan to allow openings larger than 40 acres in MA 12. A number of these amendments have occurred on the Forest. As described in the Table below, the period of affect for these amendments is 10 to 15 years. The last such amendment on Libby District occurred in 1998 in the North Fork Jackson Timber Sale. The period of affect for that project will not overlap with the current project amendment. In addition, the opening created in the East Reservoir project maintains 600 feet to cover (DEIS pg. 244). This will allow elk to utilize both forage opportunities along the unit's edge and interior without the need to venture to far from forest cover. The shape of the unit mimics naturally created openings and contributes to the juxtaposition of forage and cover for the species. Since elk will be able to use this forage, there will be no cumulative loss of forage opportunity when this amendment is considered with other Plan amendments.

Neighboring Fortine Ranger District, to the east of the analysis area, has six vegetation projects that may be active concurrently with treatments proposed under this project. Large roaming species like elk, bears, lynx, etc. are more likely to be disturbed by these neighboring activities due to the typical sizes of their

home ranges. Area elk may temporarily avoid (hours to days) these areas while activities are occurring. Although these areas may cumulatively add to disturbance on elk, there are approximately 26,000 acres within the analysis area that are available for the species as secure habitat (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 227).

These Forest Plan amendments are for the Cripple Planning Subunit only. They do not apply to other areas on the Kootenai National Forest, although other situations have arisen on the Forest where similar amendments were needed. A list of all similar Forest Plan amendments on the Forest since the inception of the 1987 plan is included at the end of this document. These amendments would not combine with any other past or foreseeable Forest Plan amendments to create a combined effect to visuals, wildlife, or any other resource. The cumulative effects of amendments to the Kootenai Forest Plan were analyzed in the *Cumulative Effects of Past Projects on Wildlife, Kootenai National Forest* (Johnson 2006) and the findings were considered in evaluating the potential effects of these project-specific amendments.

CHANGES to the FOREST PLAN that are NOT SIGNIFICANT

Our determination of whether this proposed amendment is significant was done using the process in the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook, Section 1926.51. The handbook states that changes to the land management plan that are not significant can result from four specific situations. These project-specific amendments are compared to those situations below:

1.) Actions that do not significantly alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.

These MA 12, 15, and 16 visual quality objective amendments (#1, #2, and #3) do not alter the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.

The goal of MA 12 is to maintain or enhance non-winter big-game habitat and produce a programmed yield of timber (Forest Plan Vol. 1, page 111-48).

The goal of MA 15 is timber production using various standard silviculture practices while providing for other resource values such as soil, air, water, wildlife, recreation, and forage for domestic livestock (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-64).

The goal of MA 16 is to produce timber while providing for a pleasing view (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-69).

These amendments are for lands in the Cripple Planning Subunit only. Visually, within 15-25 years of the proposed treatments, intermediate/tall shrubs and tree regeneration would be noticeable in the treated areas (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 376). Analysis of effects to wildlife indicate that openings over 40 acres may not be fully utilized by elk as foraging areas, but creating these openings reduces overall edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with greater number of openings of lesser acreage. Stringers and groups of trees would be left within the units to provide screening and minimize the effect of the openings when possible. There may be short-term disturbances within identified big game travel corridors due to project related activities (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 224). The effect is relatively short-term (fifteen years) and does not negatively affect other resources or timber production.

Amendment #4 amends the edge effect and movement corridors standard for MA 12. One 192 acre unit results in less edge effect than a number of units (in this case up to five units at 40 acres each) with forested corridors of 600 feet separating the units. Reducing edge effect is favorable for many resident species, such as fisher, brown creeper, goshawk and lynx, and once the 192 acre unit re-establishes hiding cover (approximately 15 years) a large block of uniform interior forest will result for those species more associated with interior forest habitats. Contrarily, edge creation is beneficial to many other hawk species such as red-tails and other birds including black-headed cowbirds for both foraging and nesting. Any edge creation will benefit these species in the 15 to 30 years immediately following harvest. However as time progresses, these larger patch sizes and subsequent interior forest development will become more beneficial to those interior species listed previously by creating areas for movement, nesting, rearing and foraging.

The four amendments supports the purpose and need statement to re-establish, restore and retain landscapes that are more resistant and resilient to disturbance (insect and disease infestations, fire) and

uncertain environmental conditions such as climate change by creating vigorous, healthy stands of fire and disease resistant species.

Units 73T, 75, and 188 are mostly below 4,000 feet; a small portion of 73T is above 4,000 feet. The majority of these acres will be pre-commercially thinned in the future depending on stocking levels and resource objectives. This thinning will allow the stands to continue to grow and be productive as they progress into a mature, large patch-size stand. Units 40 and 362 are all above 4,000 feet. Current policies with lynx would not allow pre-commercial thinning in these stands. However day-lighting of the western white pine is likely depending on the level of stocking at time of pre-commercial thinning. This thinning and day-lighting would allow these stands to continue to be healthy and resilient well into the pole timber size class where additional vegetation treatments may be applied as necessary to continue the trend toward healthy, resilient stands.

2.) Adjustments of management area boundaries or management prescriptions resulting from further on-site analysis when the adjustments do not cause significant changes in the multiple-use goals and objectives for long-term land and resource management.

None of the previously described amendments adjust management area boundaries or management prescriptions.

3.) Minor changes in standards and guidelines.

These four amendments are a minor temporary change to the standard. The change allows for achievement of the MA goals to produce a programmed yield of timber while maintaining big-game habitat for MA12 and timber production using various standard silviculture practices while providing for other resource values such as soil, air, water, wildlife, recreation and forage for domestic livestock for MA 15. These amendments also allow for better long-term wildlife habitat management and result in only temporary (approximately 15 years) impacts to habitat elements such as edge effect and cover. Visually, within 15-25 years of the proposed treatments, intermediate/tall shrubs and tree regeneration would be noticeable in the treated areas (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 376). Over the long-term, creating these openings reduces edge effect and fragmentation that would occur with greater number of openings of lesser acreage. Stringers and groups of trees would be left within the units to provide screening and minimize the effect of the openings when possible. There may be short-term disturbances within identified big game travel corridors due to project related activities (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 224).

4.) Opportunities for additional projects or activities that will contribute to achievement of the management prescription.

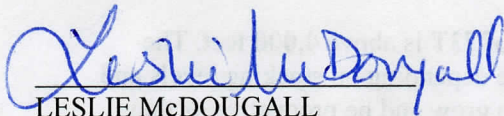
The four amendments will allow for better management of excessive forest edge habitat favoring species requiring less edge and more interior forest in the long-term. They also facilitate the control of insects and disease on the landscape via stem reduction, supporting more resilient and resistant forest stands and contributing to long-term forest health.

Alternative 2 with Modifications proposes activity in big game habitat. This begins the process of shifting the cover/forage ratio toward one more suitable for elk with no reduction in security (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 226).

CONCLUSION - EVALUATION OF SIGNIFICANCE

Based on a review of the four factors identified in the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook, 1926.51, and considering the Forest Plan in its entirety, I have determined that the adoption of these project-specific amendments to the Kootenai Forest Plan are not significant. These amendments are fully consistent with, but further refine the means to achieve current Forest Plan goals and objectives and better manage for long-term wildlife habitat and forest resiliency. Consideration has also been given to the cumulative effects of this action in addition to other similar actions across the Kootenai National Forest.

Recommended by:

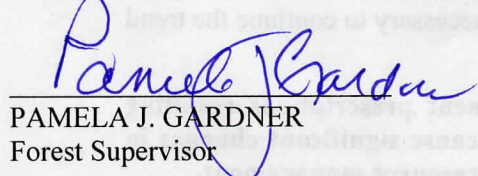

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3/4/14

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3/13/14

**KOOTENAI FOREST PLAN
LAND AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
March 2014**

East Reservoir Project-Specific Amendments

**Management Area 15 Recreation Standard #4
(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-65)**

The Kootenai National Forest Plan, page III-65, in Management Area (MA) 15 is modified for the Recreation Standard #4, to suspend the requirement that the VQO is maximum modification, in the *East Reservoir* project area. Proposed logging in the selected alternative would result in unacceptably moderate (UM) visual quality in areas for a period of 15-25 years. The modification applies only to the project area that is located on the Libby Ranger District. Please see the map in the EIS..

The current standard for Management Area 15, Visual Objective Standard #4 (Forest Plan, Vol. 1, p. III-65) is:

"The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is maximum modification."

The Forest Plan states "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for that project."

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA15 which is "timber production using various standard silviculture practices while providing for other resource values such as soil, air, water, wildlife, recreation and forage for domestic livestock." (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-64).

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

Management Area 12 Recreation Standard #2

"The Visual Quality Objective (VQO) of maximum modification in areas of low visual significance, modification in areas of moderate visual significance, and partial retention in areas of high visual significance, unless infeasible when attempting to meet the goals of the management area."

(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-48)

The Kootenai National Forest Plan, page III-48, in Management Area (MA) 12 is modified for the Recreation Standard #2, to suspend the requirement that the VQO is maximum modification, in the *East Reservoir* project area in areas of low visual significance. Proposed logging in the selected alternative would result in unacceptably moderate (UM) visual quality in areas of low visual significance for a period of 15-25 years. The modification applies only to the project area that is located on the Libby Ranger District. Please see the map in the EIS.

The Forest Plan states, "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project"

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA 12 which is to maintain or enhance nonwinter big-game habitat and produce a programmed yield of timber (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-48) Alternative 2 with Modifications proposes activity in big game habitat. This begins the process of shifting the cover/forage ratio toward one more suitable for elk with no reduction in security (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 226).

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

Management Area 16 Recreation Standard #4
“The minimum Visual Quality Objective (VQO) is modification.”
(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-69)

The Kootenai National Forest Plan, page III-48, in Management Area (MA) 16 is modified for the Recreation Standard #4, to suspend the requirement that the VQO is modification, in the *East Reservoir* project area. Project activities, specifically timber harvest, will result in maximum modification visual quality for a period of 15 to 25 years. The modification applies only to the project area that is located on the Libby Ranger District. Please see the map in the EIS.

The Forest Plan states, “If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project”

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA16 which is to produce timber while providing for a pleasing view (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-69). Visually, within 15-25 years of the proposed treatments, intermediate/tall shrubs and tree regeneration would be noticeable in the treated areas (FEIS, Ch. 3, pg. 376). These larger patch-sized stands will result in a more pleasing view in the long term.

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

Management Area 12 Wildlife and Fish Standard #7

“Maximize edge effect within economical timber harvest constraints, by shaping timber harvest units and maintain movement corridors of at least two sight distances between openings. When the edge is maximized, the shape becomes more important than the size of the units, but generally the unit size should not exceed: elk and mule deer – 40 acres or less; moose and whitetail deer – 20 acres.”

(Forest Plan, Volume I, page III-49)

The Kootenai National Forest Plan, page III-49, in Management Area (MA) 12 is modified for the Wildlife and Fish Standard #7, to maintain or enhance nonwinter big-game habitat, in the *East Reservoir* project area. Harvest unit sizes within MA 12 will exceed the recommendation for elk (40 acres) and whitetail deer (20 acres). The modification applies only to the project area that is located on the Libby Ranger District. Please see the map in the EIS.

The Forest Plan states, “If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project”

This project-specific amendment allows achievement of the overall Forest Plan goal for MA 12 which is to maintain or enhance nonwinter big-game habitat and produce a programmed yield of timber (FP, Vol. 1, pg. III-48). Alternative 2 with Modifications will reduce tree canopy from fully stocked to a seedtree and/or shelterwood prescription in concert with exceeding 40 acre limitation as directed by NFMA. While local movement of big game may be affected as a result of one 192 acre unit, one unit results in less edge effect than a number of units (in this case up to five units at 40 acres each) with forested corridors of 600 feet separating the units. Reducing edge effect is favorable for many resident species including goshawks, various woodpeckers, fisher, and once the 192 unit re-establishes hiding cover (approximately 15 years) a large block of uniform interior forest will result for those species more associated with interior forest habitats.

Project-specific amendments must comply with the National Environmental Policy Act procedures. Compliance with these procedures and rationale for this project-specific amendment is contained in the East Reservoir Project DEIS, FEIS and draft ROD.

LIST OF PAST PROJECT-SPECIFIC AMENDMENTS TO MA 15 RECREATION STANDARD #4, MA 12 RECREATION STANDARD #2, MA 16 RECREATION STANDARD #4, MA 12 WILDLIFE AND FISH STANDARD #7

PROJECT SPECIFIC AMENDMENTS						
FY	District	Decision Date	Project Name	Standard Amended	Description	Years in Effect
1993	Rexford	20-Oct-93	Compartment 26	MA12 WS#7, TS#2	Not meeting hiding cover requirements due to harvest of dead lodgepole pine	10-15 yrs
1995	Rexford	5-Jan-95	Compartment 4	MA12 TS#2 and WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors	10-15 yrs
1996	Rexford	1-Oct-95	North Fork Salvage	MA12, WS#7; MA14 TS#5b	Harvest within movement corridors	10-15 yrs
1996	Rexford	24-Sep-96	Huckleberry Salvage	MA12, TS#2, WS#7; MA12 FS#3	Harvest within movement corridors.Existing ORD 0.65; during sale = 1.03, after sale = 0.65	10-15 yrs (movement corridors); 2 yrs (ORD)
1997	Libby	21-Oct-96	Warland Salvage	MA12 TS#2 & WS#7, MA12 FS#3	Harvest within movement corridors Existing ORD 2.6; during sale = 2.05, after sale = 0.66	10-15 years; 2 years
1997	Libby	23-Oct-96	Bristow Salvage	MA12 TS#2 & WS#7, MA12 FS#3	Harvest within movement corridors.Existing ORD 1.27; during sale = 1.27, after sale = 0.74	10-15 years; 2 years
1997	Libby	26-Nov-96	Weigel Salvage	MA 12 TS#2 & WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors	10-15 years
1997	Libby	19-Jun-97	Cripple Horse Timber Sale	MA 12 TS#2 & WS#7	Harvest within movement corridor	10-15 years
1997	Rexford	18-Nov-96	Burro Face Salvage	MA12 TS#2 & WS#7; MA12, FS#3	Harvest within movement corridors Existing ORD 1.01, during sale 1.49, after sale 0.75	10-15 years; 3 years
1997	Rexford	6-Jun-97	McSutton Salvage	MA 12 TS #2 & WS #7, MA15 TS#5, M12 FS#3	Harvest within movement corridors. Harvest adjacent to units not recovered. Existing ORD 0.81, during sale 1.53, after sale 0.75	10-15 years; 2-4 years; 3 years
1998	Libby	17-Jun-98	NF Jackson Salvage TS	MA12, TS#2, WS#7;	Harvest within movement corridors	10-15 years
1999	Rexford	23-Jan-98	Parsnip Lodgepole Pine Salvage Timber Sale	MA16, TS#4	Suspend requirement that existing cutting units will not be enlarged until they are certified as regenerated and recovered	10-15 years
1999	Rexford	16-Jun-99	Pinkham Timber Sale	MA12, TS#2 & WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	10-15 years
1999	Three Rivers	18-Jun-99	Clay Beaver Timber Sale	MA12, TS#2 & WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	10-15 years
2000	Libby	22-Jun-00	McSwede Timber Sale	MA16, MA11	Short term reduction in VQO for both MAs	20-25 years for each
2002	Rexford	5-Oct-01	Pink Stone Fire Recovery	MA12, TS#2, WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	10-15 years
2002	Rexford	14-Dec-01	Gold/Boulder/Sullivan	MA12, TS#2, WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	10-15 years
2004	Rexford	28-Jul-04	Lower Big Creek	MA12, TS#2; WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	15 years
2005	Rexford	14-May-05	McSutton	MA12, TS#2; WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	10-15 years
2008	Rexford	25-Apr-08	Young Dodge	MA12, TS#2; WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	10-15 years
2012	Rexford	2-May-12	Young Dodge	MA12, TS#2; WS#7	Harvest within movement corridors adjacent to un-recovered openings	10-15 years

TS – Timber Sale MA – Management Area ORD – Open Road Density

